



Council Member Motion

For the Committee of the Whole Meeting of 18 April, 2024

To: Committee of the Whole **Date:** 18 April 2024
From: Councillor Jeremy Caradonna and Councillor Krista Loughton
Subject: Reducing reliance on parks sheltering in Victoria

BACKGROUND

Sheltering in Victoria's parks has occurred for many years, but the issue became exacerbated during the pandemic, when overnight sheltering bylaws were temporarily set aside. Although 7pm-7am sheltering bylaws are now back in place, some parks are becoming encampments, which creates public health challenges and limits public use of park amenities.

This motion focuses on offering housing or indoor sheltering to the people sheltering in Vic West Park and Irving Park as a precondition for phasing out sheltering in those two parks. Irving and Vic West have become almost permanent encampments.

The City's sheltering Relocation Coordinator and BC Housing are well positioned to undertake this work.

This approach would build on the successful efforts at Topaz Park and Stadacona Park, in which unhoused people were successfully transitioned into housing or indoor sheltering as a precondition for prohibiting sheltering in those parks.

Given the movement of unhoused individuals between parks and Pandora Street, there is reason to believe that housing the people currently in the parks can also reduce the existing pressures on Pandora, thereby make it easier for the Province and service providers to shelter or house those currently sheltering on or near Pandora.

The Province is stepping up and expanding supportive housing and sheltering for unhoused people in the region. These necessary steps permit the City to reduce reliance on sheltering in City parks, which are not intended to be sites for permanent habitation.

In early 2024, the City signed an MOU with the Province that brought the HEART and HEARTH programs to Victoria. According to BC Housing, "BC Housing is working with partners to provide people living outdoors and in encampments with better access to a range of support services, new shelters, and housing options through new programs funded by the Province under the 'Belonging in BC Homelessness Plan'."


The intention of HEART and HEARTH, in the Victoria context, is to address the encampments on Victoria's streets and in its parks. The reopening of Caledonia Place (formerly known as Tiny Town) has resulted in 30 people moving from area shelters into that facility, thereby freeing up 30 beds in shelters that can help reduce the burdens placed on the City's parks. Additional sheltering is

expected to come online soon, further reducing the rationale for widespread parks sheltering.

If this motion passes, numerous parks in Victoria would remain open for sheltering, including three that permit overnight sheltering.

RECOMMENDATION

- That Council direct staff to work with BC Housing, relevant service providers, and the City's sheltering Relocation Coordinator, to offer indoor sheltering or housing to the people sheltering in Irving Park and Vic West Park;
- That, contingent upon the above taking place, Council direct staff to phase out and eventually prohibit overnight sheltering in Irving Park and Vic West Park by 1 August 2024, via an update to the Parks Regulation Bylaw.


Coun. Jeremy Caradonna
Coun. Krista Loughton